

# Environmental Conflict: Myth or Reality?

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## ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this paper is to draw the nexus between environment and conflict with the concept of redefining security. This paper is aimed to answer the question whether environmental degradation or environment as a broad concept can lead to a conflict directly, if it can do so then how- this will be the central question of this Paper. To do so, some relevant case studies will be framed to show the nexus between environment and conflict. Finally, there will be concluding remarks which will draw the critical perspective behind Environmental Conflict.

**KEYWORDS:** *environmental conflict, environment, population, resource, scarcity*

**How to cite this paper:** Fatema-Tuj-Juhra "Environmental Conflict: Myth or Reality?" Published in International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (ijtsrd), ISSN: 2456-6470, Volume-5 | Issue-4, June 2021, pp.978-981, URL: [www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd42451.pdf](http://www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd42451.pdf)



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## INTRODUCTION:

"The Political and strategic impact of surging population, spreading disease, deforestation and soil erosion, water depletion, air pollution and possibly rising sea levels – developments that will prompt mass migration and, in turn, incite group conflicts- will be the core foreign policy challenge in the twenty-first century".

- Robert Kaplan

Robert Kaplan's 'Coming Anarchy' (1994) made the idea popular that increasing population and environmental degradation can lead to conflict directly or indirectly. The concept of environment and conflict has become so prominent from Kaplan's idea that the term has become now 'Environmental Conflict'. This Paper is aimed to draw the link between the two separate spheres into one frame-environment and security. This paper is divided into six parts including introduction and conclusion. The second part will draw the flow that how the definition of traditional security has changed through the end of the cold war and how environment became a global concern. The third part will draw the nexus between environmental conflict or what is environmental conflict. The fourth Part will draw the case studies of international and intra- national potential and direct conflicts. Each case study will draw the direct or indirect connection between environment and conflict or potential conflict. The fifth part will provide a critical analysis whether environment and conflict are directly linked or not and if they are connected then in which process, which will be drawn through path dependent analysis.

## REDEFINING TRADITIONAL SECURITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

Large scale conflicts which are violent in nature require more attention from policy makers to progress military strategy. 2.96% of GDP was spent on military capacity in 1996. Climate change and environment received the least concern in term of the process of securitization. Richard Falk was the first person who brought the concept of environment into security. His concept of 'First law of Ecological Politics' stated that: "there exists an inverse relationship between the interval of time available for adaptive change and the likelihood and intensity of violent conflict, trauma, and coercion accompanying the process of adaptation". Lester Brown found also a link between environmental degradation and climate change. His focus was on food security including fisheries, grassland etc. In 1989, the debate became more accepted as the cold war was declining. It was also argued that the low-lying delta countries or arctic countries have also risk to sink and it will lead to potential conflict.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENVIRONMENT AND CONFLICT

The idea of scarce resource and environment is often used to understand the link between Environment and Conflict. "Environmental degradation, depletion and lack of access" to natural resources may lead to violent conflict. There have been efforts to connect ecological degradation and resource scarcity as a prominent security factor of a nation.

The assumption is that international wars and conflicts have been fought for the access of land and water through biblical times. In fact, the link between environmental resource and outbreak of conflict has been identified before. Now the difference remains in – (1) growth of population that is a stimulating factor (2) the difference between renewable and non-renewable resources.

Number (2) is the main factor that distinguishes the former analysis and present analysis. Today most experts do not contest the influence that non-renewable resources scarcity has the main impact on environmental conflict, rather they focus on renewable resource such as cropland, fish, air and water. Gunther Baechler reflects that in which process environmental conflicts have become inevitable for 'overuse of renewable resource'. There are two important factors in understanding this perspective:

1. Direct vs. Indirect Conflict
2. International vs. Intra national Conflict

Direct conflict refers to the conflict over renewable resources which arise for direct competition between two or more parties to get the access of resources. Indirect Conflict means the conflict where environment comes as a factor interacting with other social factors. International Conflict means conflict between two or more states and intra-national means conflict within the boundary of the state.

#### SELECTED CASE STUDIES

This part will scrutinize four case studies (Syria-Israel, Ethiopia- Somalia, Pakistan, Philippines) to understand Direct/ Indirect International and Intra-national environmental conflicts which have been analyzed as case studies in the report of United Nations Environmental Program. The rationale behind selecting these case studies is important to understand the relation behind environmental conflict. Some conflicts are directly related to environmental resource while some intra-national conflicts have been identified as a factor of ethnic conflicts. Each case study will provide a distinct example to point out the connection between Environment and Conflict.

#### ➤ International Conflicts -

##### Israel-Syria and the water of Golan

The Israel-Syria conflict started with the Arab-Israel war of 1948. The 1949 Armistice Agreement created three 'demilitarized zone' in Syria-Israel border covering the "South-eastern part of the Sea of Galilee eastwards to the Yarmuk river where the boundary of Israel, Jordan and Syria converge". Israel began construction in July, 1953 for its 'National Water Carrier' at the 'Daughters of Jacob Jordan Bridge' where the 'demilitarized zone' was located. Fire was opened by Syrian artillery unit at the site of construction. The United Nations Security Council voted for continuation of Israeli work.

'Jordan Valley Unified Water Plan' or the 'Johnston Plan' was developed by U.S Ambassador Eric Johnston for a project of 'unified water resource development'. But Arab League Council decided to reject the plan. The unified plan was failed to be ratified but Israel and Jordan started to work within their functional limits. Israel completed their 'National Water Carrier Project' and got the access of water from Sea of Galilee. The Arab states took the Israeli economic growth as a major threat. They decided in a meeting of Cairo that the establishment of Israel is 'basic threat for the Arab Nation'.

The Arab States thought to decrease Israel's water carrier capacity by the diversion of the water of Jordan River to Yarmuk River. In 1964, Israel declared that this type of act would be the 'infringement of their sovereign rights'.

Three notable border clashes took place in 1965. It started with the clash between Israeli farmers and Syrian Army Patrols. The control of water resource led to the six days war of 1967. The Report of UNEP has pointed out this Arab-Israeli conflict as Direct International Conflict over water resource. Many scholars have argued that the war was never fought for water rather it was for political mistrust. But the thing is, Israel owns two thirds of Golan Heights and it supplies thirty percent of Israel's water supply. Without being a major source of water resource, Golan's fertile land is perfect for farming and agriculture. Most importantly, Israeli firms are currently generating 'wind-farms' there. So there is a significance of direct link between environment and conflict here.

#### The Ogaden War: Somalia Ethiopia Conflict

The Ogaden Basin is renowned for the reserve of hydro-carbon and crude oil. There are two main Pastoralists group to understand the conflict of Somalia and Ethiopia: Ishaq and Ogaden (second one occupied the Haud in Eastern Ethiopia). There have been conflicts between them for scarce resources.

Increasing drought and famine provoked migration from Ishaq (Northern Somalia) to Ogaden area. Desertification and over-grazing were the main problems for the famine and drought. Due to population growth and increased desertification, the Ishaq were forced to move to Haud (Eastern Ethiopia). The official report of 1952-53 had reported that 80 persons died for disputes over 'grazing and watering rights'. The increased migration from Ishaq into Haud generated conflict between the pastoralists group and Ogaden. In the mid of 1950s, Ethiopia claimed the sovereignty of Ogaden. According to the report of UNEP, these clashes worked as a key factor behind the war of Ethiopia and Somalia from 1977 to 1978.

The Ogaden war is mainly known as rivalry between the super powers where USA supported for Somalia and Soviet Union Supported for Ethiopia. The Somali National Army invaded Ogaden on 13 July, 1977. Somalia's Siad Barre's regime came into power in 1969 and saw the political disorder of Ethiopia as an opportunity. According to Somali government, Ogaden belonged to them historically.

According to the report of UNEP, this conflict has been analyzed as Indirect International Conflict as the Environmental factors gradually led to conflict. Over-grazing of Somali bush, deforestation and desertification caused economic decline and famine. Migration of Somalis into Ethiopian territory caused increased competition over scarce resources which led to conflict. Though there is another analysis that the conflict took place because the cold war was there and the two super powers helped the two rival states. But it can be seemed that there is a connection between environmental degradation, scarce resource and conflict.

#### ➤ Intra-national Conflicts

##### The Case Study of Pakistan

Pakistan has been experiencing a growing number of clashes which are social or ethnic based and takes place in large urban center like Karachi. Pakistan depends heavily on the

Indus River system and the water distribution of Pakistan is highly inequitable.

In Pakistan, water pollution has caused growing demand of water from a swelling population. Periods of drought and inadequate sewerage system had polluted the rivers Pakistan through domestic and industrial waste. Deforestation and soil degradation has increased the demand for new agricultural land. The amount of forest has decreased from 14.2 percent to 5.2 percent in the Pakistani total land area. Deforestation and 'salinity, water logging, flooding, loss of organic matter have made 62 percent of Pakistani land unfit for crops, livestock and forestry'.

The growth of high population and density, lower economic development, scarcity resource can lead to potential conflict. Land scarcity has allowed the economically strong social groups to get the access of most productive land and forest in rural Pakistan. Another problem is limited food production is not increasing with the growth of population. In 2009, Pakistan ranked 11<sup>th</sup> in the list of world's 'Food Security Risk Index'. From May 2007 to October 2009 (when the price of wheat flour increased), riots in Pakistan led to stealing of grain and flour in massive amounts. Pakistan's Northern and Western areas' food security situation is considered to be the worst.

Ecological marginalization has led rural Pakistanis to move to large urban centers. Urban violence has been occurring in Hyderabad, Islamabad and Rawalpindi. In Karachi, competition for urban resources like electrical power has led a series of incident between Panjabis, Pathans and Sindh people.

Strife among the political-military elite in Pakistan is a major factor that prevents from distributing resource equally. Resource scarcity has caused elite control over resources and ecologically marginalized poor Pakistani people are becoming vulnerable. Another problem in this country remains in natural disasters like flood and earthquake. In relation climate change, flooding patterns follow changes in monsoon seasons. All these are leading factors towards internal conflict and problem.

The UNEP Report has scrutinized the internal environmental conflicts which are caused by water pollution, soil degradation, flood, earthquake and others as Indirect Intra-national Environmental Conflict. It can be assumed why they have identified this case study as a case study of indirect conflict. The problems over the demand of water resource are forcing people to migrate and as a result conflicts and riots are seen in cities like Karachi for food production. So, the link here is different than the International Conflict because there was no direct conflict for environmental degradation, there are some middle points here.

### **The Case Study of Philippines**

The New People's Army (NPA) started an insurgency against the Government of Philippines during the 1970s and 1980s. The NPA was supported by the rural and poor Filipinos as they have suffered poverty and economic woes. The economic woes can be traced with 'population growth, deforestation, soil erosion, declining water supply' which decreased the agricultural productivity of land.

Because of Deforestation and soil erosion woodlands were confined in the upland of Philippines. Consequently, farmers were forced to migrate ecologically fragile upland. 20 million was the population of the upland's people. This migration is

threatening to the forests of upland as cycle of deforestation was increased.

There are some social effects of environmental degradation. 70 percent Filipinos rely on agriculture and fishing. Decreasing productivity of land increased poverty of many people. There was assumption among the common people that the government was unresponsive to their problems.

This increased rate of poverty for Deforestation and Soil erosion caused the mobilization of poor people by the NPA's anti-government campaign. As a result, the communist party was able to mobilize people by the condition of exploitation and class struggle. Their ability to mobilize people resulted in direct conflict with the government and still they are fighting against the government by collecting revolutionary taxes which they collect from the areas they operate.

This environmental conflict has been identified as Direct Intra-national conflict as NPA had direct conflict with government and they got the support from rural people because of environmental concern. Most importantly, they collect revolutionary taxes from rural people for their revolution. Deforestation and Soil Erosion were the major factors which caused the problem and later it took a different shape with the involvement of NPA.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICT: WHETHER THERE IS A DIRECT RELATION OR NOT?**

This paper was aimed to show whether environment and conflict are connected or not, if they are related with each other then how? To answer the question, four case studies have been described to understand the nexus between environment and conflict which are pointed as direct or indirect environmental conflict in the UNEP Report. From the case studies, if we want to bring a general analysis that how the different concepts can be put together in one box, then the answer is like that- "the nexus between the environment and conflict is not always straightforward". Environmental factors are entangled like a complex web where social, economic, political aspects function together. The UNEP report states - "Environmental conditions and resources should be a focal point for conflict resolution and conflict prevention at both national and international level".

From the case studies, another point can be easily understood that resource is the key factor behind any type of environmental conflict. Conflicts over water resource have caused the Syria- Israel or Arab-Israel war which was also a cause of political mistrust. Water flow, diversion, salination, flooding are the most common environmental elements which caused direct International Conflict. Israel-Palestine, Ecuador-Peru these countries have some problem over water resource and they had conflict.

And the most common environmental factors behind Indirect International or Intra-national conflict are deforestation, soil erosion, desertification, flooding and pollution. These factors have impact on environmental conflict directly or indirectly. Each of the case study has been described by using flow charts where there can be seen a link between environmental degradation, resource scarcity and conflict. The relation is like some dots which cannot be connected directly always but there is a connection between them and environment remains as factor behind many indirect conflicts.

### **CONCLUSION**

The paper was aimed to draw whether there is a nexus between environment and conflict or not; if there is a link



then how they are linked? To answer the question, some case studies have been analyzed which show that there is a link but it is not direct in all case. The link can be direct, it can also be indirect. But environmental conflicts take place for real and it is not myth, rather it is reality. There are some factors like resource, political, economic condition which connect the two separate spheres (environment and conflict) into one sphere and cause environmental conflict.

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